

Like the Women on TV by PeonyParty

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Summary:

“What’s wrong?” Mike asks, shocked at her reaction.

El doesn’t look him in the eye. She can’t kiss him. Not because she doesn’t want to, but because she doesn’t know how. She wants to move her mouth against his like they do on TV, feverishly and desperately.

Like the Women on TV

At only 14, Mike already had what most people dreamed of. A family that took care of him, friends that never left his side, and a love so fantastical that it spanned entire universes.

At only 13, Eleven had everything she never allowed herself to dream of. A Papa that cared more about her than her abilities, friends that were patient and so incredibly brave, an older sister who became a constant reminder that El was not alone. But most importantly, she had Mike. She could see stars in his dark eyes. And they glowed so bright that it burned.

Sometimes El watches television, focuses on the characters in soap operas, in news programmes. Beautiful women with long, full hair and lots of jewellery. Men in tailored suits; speaking in husky voices. The women flaunt, and kiss men dramatically. In news programmes, men and women are eloquent and speak fast, and El frowns, switches the channel with a quick nod of her head.

There's a knock on the door, the special knock. She unlocks it swiftly, smiles when Hopper staggers through, tired and dishevelled.

"Hey, kid." He says, taking off his coat. "Don't tell me you've been watching TV all day."

She shakes her head, "Reading and writing."

"Good," he smiles.

"And watching TV."

He chuckles, heads to the fridge to grab a cold beer.

"What you want for dinner?"

Eleven considers.

"Hopper," she says.

"Yeah?"

"I want...earrings." She pulls at her earlobes to demonstrate.

"Earrings?"

"Yes, like the women on television."

He plops down on the couch next to her, furrows his brows. "Why do you want that, kid?"

"It's pretty," she says, then sighs and adds, "Nancy has it."

"Well you know," he says, rubbing exhaustion from his face, "to have

earrings, you need to pierce your ears."

"Pierce?"

"Make holes with a needle."

She recoils, and Hopper laughs. "Yeah kid, it ain't so easy."

Before sleep takes her, El thinks about Mike. How he smiles when he sees her, how her heart beats when he's close or when he touches her. She thinks how much he's changed, how puberty made him taller, lankier. How his voice cracks sometimes, and how embarrassed he gets about it, pink in the face, eyes downcast. She wants to kiss him to stop him from feeling bad, but she doesn't. She can't kiss like those women on the television, clutching, moving their mouths rhythmically.

"I want to pierce my ears," El tells Mike when he radios her after school. "Do you know how?"

"Ummm,"

"Hopper says it's with a needle."

"Needle? El, why do you want to piece your ears?"

"I just want to." She says simply. "Do you know how?"

"I think you get it done at the mall." Mike says, unsure. "I have to ask Nancy."

"Please."

"Maybe she can take you to get it done."

"Okay." El says, happy. "Are you going to visit today?"

"Uh, yeah of course." He says, still needing the permission to see her, the reassurance that she wants to see him too.

Mike bikes to the cabin in the woods, cold wind nipping at his skin. He knows the directions, repeats them to himself as he walks in the woods through the near darkness of a winter afternoon.

She watches through the window of the living room, waiting to see him dragging the bike in-between the trees, her enthusiasm palpable to the point of sweaty hands. She unlocks the door before he even has the chance to drop the bike on the snow-dusted ground. Then she grabs his hand and leads him inside, pulling down to sit next to the fireplace.

"You're really cold," she says, letting go of his hand. "You should wear mittens."

"Yeah," Mike says "I couldn't find them, so-"

But before he can finish, she takes both of his hands into hers, gently rubbing them, fingertips tracing circles on the back of his hand.

"Is it better?" She asks, making eye contact.

"Much warmer," he murmurs. The warmth spreads from his hands to the rest of his body, until he's shivering not from cold, but from nerves. Her hair has fallen gently across her forehead, and the way she looks at him from behind her eyelashes involuntarily causes him to lean in to kiss her. But she recoils, eyes darting to the side, hands dropping his.

"What's wrong?" Mike asks, shocked at her reaction.

El doesn't look him in the eye. She can't kiss him. Not because she doesn't want to, but because she doesn't know how. She wants to move her mouth against his like they do on TV, feverishly and desperately.

"El, is everything okay?" Mike repeats, snapping her out of her thoughts.

"Yes." She says simply. "I'm sorry."

Hopper drives him home later in the evening, scowling like a dad who can't trust anyone around his daughter.

"Everything okay, kid?" He asks finally, noticing Mike's disheartened disposition.

"Everything's great."

At home, Mike lies on his bed, wondering if El has finally lost interest in him. He should have seen it coming, he should have known that he could never compare, could never satisfy El, the girl who saved the town twice already, and was probably destined to save it a few more times. He should have realized that she's get tired of him eventually. The realization is painful. Nearly as painful as having lost her the first time. Perhaps only he can see the stars in her eyes. Bright and glowing, all encompassing.

"Mike!" Nancy yells from her room the next morning. "Are you coming to the mall after school?"

"What for?"

"What do you mean?" She says, barging into his room, eyebrows furrowed. "I'm taking El to get her ears pierced. I figured you'd wanna come."

Mike sighs. "It's fine."

"Did you guys have a fight?"

"No," Mike says. "No, everything is okay. I just promised the guys I'd go to the arcade after school."

"Okay," Nancy says, disbelief thick in her voice.

"Do you know why Mike didn't want to come today?" She asks Eleven as they walk through the mall towards the boutique.

"He didn't want to come?" El asks, expression suddenly pained.

"You didn't know?"

"I don't know why." El says.

"I'm sure it's nothing," Nancy tries to dissipate the sudden change of mood.

"Yes." El says, "Nothing."

But it's not nothing, and El's heart sinks to the bottom of her stomach, where each beat reverberates painfully. She's been foolish enough to think, to hope, that Mike would be there forever. That he liked her not like a friend, but more. She was wrong, and it hurt. Suddenly, the passionate kisses, and the fancy earrings felt stupid. Unnecessary.

"Hey," Nancy says. "Are you scared or something, because-"

"No," El says. "I just don't want to do it anymore."

"Hey Mike," Nancy yells down to the basement. "Shouldn't you be at the arcade?"

"None of your business!"

"What the hell is wrong with you?" She says, walking down the stairs.

"Nothing,"

"Something is wrong, and I'm starting to get the full picture here."

"Good for you."

"You had a fight with Eleven."

"No, I didn't. I already told you that." Mike retorts.

"Then why are you both acting like the world is about to end?" She says, throwing her hands in the air.

"What?"

"El didn't get her ears pierced today. Even though she probably could have done it herself with the daggers she was throwing all afternoon."

“What are you talking about?” He says, grimacing.

“Did something happen between you?”

“For the millionths time, no.” He shouts. “We’re friends like we always were. So can you leave me alone?”

There’s a moment of silence before Nancy speaks. She sighs, rolls her eyes and cracks an ironic laugh.

“Friends?” she says, “Okay Mike. Why don’t you just go over there and figure it out.”

He frowns, looks at the floor, suddenly embarrassed. “There’s nothing to figure out.”

“Whatever it is, is probably a misunderstanding. So take your ass to Hopper’s and figure it out.”

“Fine,” he says, passes her and walks up the staircase dejectedly.

Though it’s winter, this afternoon is the first time that Eleven feels cold. The TV is turned off, forgotten because of other things. Things that gnaw on her until tears stream down her face, one after the other in quick succession. She doesn’t want to admit she’s crying because of Mike. Again. But this time it seems more desperate than ever. And this time, it’s not Hopper or bed men that are standing in their way. This time it’s life itself. And it hurts to have gone through all of that with so much hope, only to lose it now.

There’s a knock on the door, and it startles her because she isn’t expecting anyone. Hopper doesn’t get home until at least an hour later, and he has his own special knock.

“Eleven?”

It’s Mike. Her blood pressure spikes significantly. Can barely feel her legs as she walks to open the door for him, manually, as though she’d forgotten how to use her powers.

“Mike?”

His face expression mellows considerably when he sees her.

“Is everything okay?” He asks. “You’ve been crying.”

She realizes immediately that she hadn’t had a chance to wipe her tears.

“It’s fine.”

She walks towards the living room, and he follows her cautiously.

“Um,” He starts. “Nancy said you changed your mind about piercing your ears.”

“Yes.” El says.

“How come?”

“I wanted to be pretty,” she says. “Like the women on TV. Like Nancy.”

Mike gulps. “El, you are pretty. You’re...you’re beautiful. You don’t have to do things like that.”

El stares at him, confused.

“I’m sorry,” He adds. “Maybe I shouldn’t have said that. I don’t know.”

“Shouldn’t have said what?”

“That...that I think you’re beautiful.” His face is cherry red, and he’s staring at the floor as though it’s the only place he can look. “I don’t know if you even like me like that anymore. It’s okay if you don’t. It’s just hard for me to-”

“Don’t like you like that?” El repeats, still confused. “I thought you didn’t like me like that.”

“What?”

“Nancy said you didn’t want to come.”

“I...I thought you didn’t want me too. You acted so weird the night before, when...when I wanted to kiss you. And then you said you were sorry.”

El reaches out to touch his upper arm, eyes glossy with tears. “I’m sorry.” She says. “I wanted to kiss you, but I don’t know how.”

Mike furrows his brows. “You do know how-”

“Not like that.” El interrupts. “Like on TV, like...like this.”

She throws her arms around his neck, bringing him so close to her that she can smell the scent of his shampoo. Then she closes her eyes, all too forcefully, and crashes her lips into his, a little too wide. Mike gasps, and she pulls away, frightened.

“I can’t,” she whimpers.

“No, no,” Mike says, pulling her towards him again. “No, it’s just that on TV the adults kiss that way. But we don’t have to, it’s okay.”

“But I want to.” El says, staring at her lap.

“Um okay,” Mike says, his face growing red again. “We can try again.”

He takes her arms and places them around his neck, then puts one on her waist, and one on the side of her face, gingerly. Her skin is so soft and warm that it sends shivers down his spine. Mike closes his eyes, and parts his lips, just barely. El watches him, parts her lips as well, so that when they finally meet in the middle, they fit perfectly. Like a puzzle.

She smiles against his mouth, moves one of her hands to his chest, right over his heart. He opens his eyes then, and the stars in them shine brighter than ever.

"See," he says, when they part. "You can do it."

She grins, lays her head against his shoulder, their fingers intertwined.

"I'm sorry," Mike says. "I should have come with you and Nancy. I was being a jerk."

The doors swing open before El can respond, and a very angry Hopper walks in.

"I wouldn't be this angry about catching you making out on my couch, if you'd at least shut the door properly."

Author's Note:

This story is a bit of a mess, but I had lots of fun writing it and I hope you have just as much fun reading. Drop me a comment ;)